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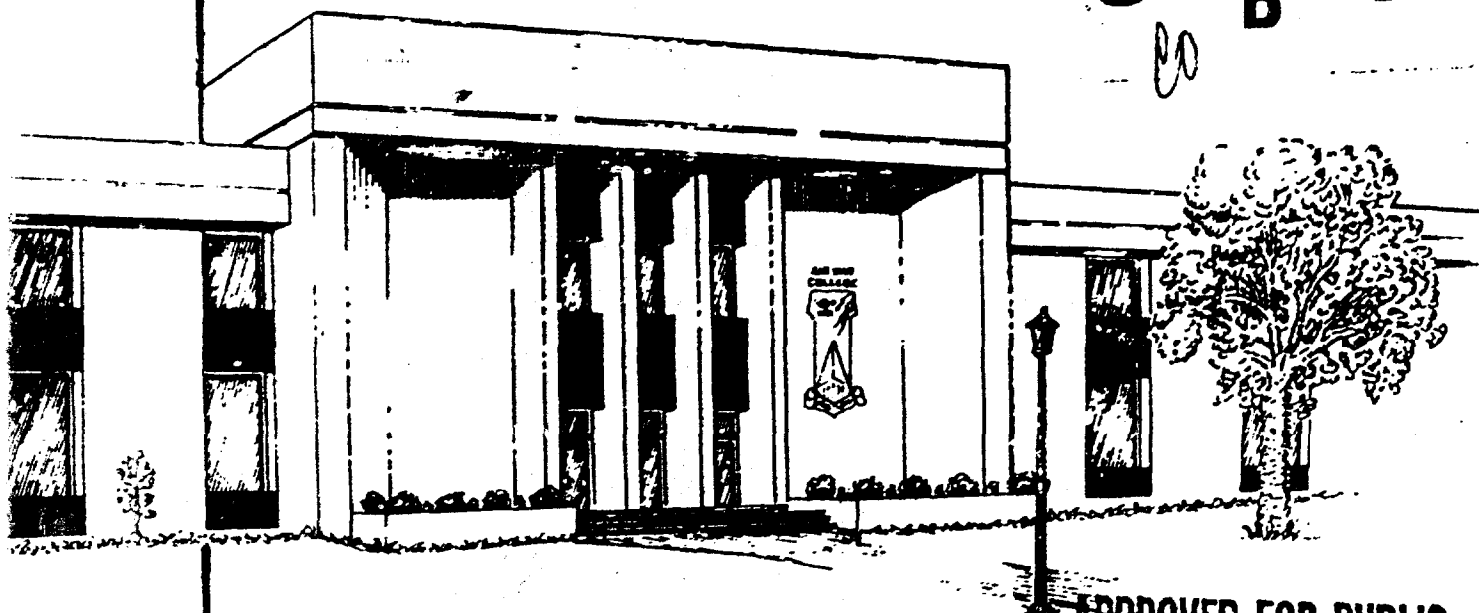
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LOW-INTENSITY CONFLICT:  
IMPLICATIONS FOR USSOUTHCOM

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AIR UNIVERSITY  
UNITED STATES AIR FORCE  
MAXWELL AIR FORCE BASE, ALABAMA

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LOW-INTENSITY CONFLICT:  
IMPLICATIONS FOR USSOUTHCOM

by

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A DEFENSE ANALYTICAL STUDY SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY  
IN  
FULFILLMENT OF THE CURRICULUM  
REQUIREMENT

Advisor: Lieutenant Colonel (P) Joe T. Stroud

MAXWELL AIR FORCE BASE, ALABAMA

May 1989

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

TITLE: Low-Intensity Conflict: Implications for USSOUTHCOM

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The focus of this study is on the implications of social, political, military, and economic conditions in Central America that directly relate to operational planning and understanding of regional issues in the Low-Intensity Conflict (LIC) environment. These four critical issues along with the influence of insurgencies driven by drug trafficking are analyzed.

Complicating the study was a general lack of agreement in the academic and military communities as to the accepted definition of LIC. Rather, the subject of tactics and operational strategy was found to respond to hostilities more appropriate to the conventional environment. For the purpose of this study, a modified JCS Pub 1 definition of LIC is offered for the reader's consideration which integrates a force size into the concept of LIC.

Formulating a clear and coherent strategy is a central problem of the LIC debate. This study identifies a myriad of influences which confound the process.

If low-intensity warfare in Central America is to be contained, the military commander and strategist will be obliged to adjust conventional thinking in terms of these regional realities. Once freed from parochial thinking, policy may be devised to strengthen political, social, and economic programs with results of visible long-term worth.

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Colonel John F. Sheffey, USA is a Distinguished Military Graduate of East Tennessee State University where he received a Bachelor of Science degree in Geology. He holds a Master of Science degree in Business Economics from the University of Utah. His military education includes the Engineer Basic and Advanced Officer Courses and the United States Army Command and General Staff College.

He has held a variety of command and staff positions both in the United States and overseas. He commanded the 46th Engineer Battalion (Cbt Hvy), Fort Rucker, Alabama (1986-88), and has served as the Assistant Division Commander of the North Central Division Corps of Engineers, Chicago, Illinois (1984-86). Other assignments include Army Advisor, 30th Engineer Brigade, Charlotte, North Carolina (1981-84); Executive Officer, 52nd Engineer Battalion (Heavy), FORSCOM (1975-78); Assistant District Engineer, Fairbanks, Alaska (1972-75); Instructor, Engineer School, Fort Belvoir, Virginia (1969-72); Commander, Company C, 93rd Engineer Battalion, Republic of Vietnam (1968-69); Commander, Company C, 94th Engineer Battalion, Germany (1967-68).

Colonel Sheffey's decorations include the Legion of Merit, Bronze Star Medal, the Meritorious Service Medal (fourth award), the Army Commendation Medal (second award), and the Parachutist Badge.



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## STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

The most important security challenge confronting the United States, aside from maintaining a strong strategic deterrent against the Soviet Union, is to improve its ability to operate at the lower end of the conflict spectrum in Central America with its associated mixture of social, political, economic, and military complexities.<sup>(1)</sup> The lack of an effective US foreign policy to confront these complexities will pose grave problems for SOUTHCOM.

There are many indicators and trends that would imply the region is moving towards low levels of violence, subversive activities, and civil disturbances. One need only to pick up a newspaper to see the implications of such a threat to democracy and global peace. Clearly, the United States has an interest in preserving democracy in Central America, a society so close geographically, culturally, and ethnically to its own. It does make a difference if regional governments are forced to depart from respect for basic human rights--ultimately to submit to authoritarian governments at the end of a smoking gun. Economic and social tragedy is easy to trace to intervention by bullets rather than ballots. The key to this problem will be to remove the region from debt-ridden poverty and political violence. The complexities of this venture will cause serious political and military difficulties, and will provide an extraordinary range of problems for US policy-makers and military planners alike.

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### Introduction

This paper will argue the implications of social, political, military, and economic complexities in Central America that directly relate to operational planning and the understanding of regional issues in the LIC environment. These implications and issues will demand a wide-range of flexible responses from the strategic and tactical commander, and pose grave problems for regional policy. The idea of unconventional warfare evokes occasional comparisons with early states of Vietnam. US policy toward Central America represents to a large extent, similarities with the painfully familiar problem of providing a besieged government with weapons, economic aid, and advisor tactical training followed by military presence when all else fails. The frustrating aspects of the Vietnam War from a historical perspective were that as far as the military's ability to organize, train, and equip the forces, it was an unqualified success. The theory of "how" to apply the forces was entirely a different issue. It totally failed to achieve the national objective. Without a formal declaration of war, national will was an evasive part of the complex formula. Public support was never oriented on the enemy or political objectives. With a declaration of war, both the government and the American people would have shared the responsibility. This is not to imply that a declaration of war should be a central issue during LIC, it simply must be considered prior to escalation.



Most would argue that, for the foreseeable future, LIC will be the dominant form of confrontation in developing nations. Yet, little agreement in the academic or military communities exists as to the accepted definition of LIC.<sup>(2)</sup> Rather, the subject of tactics and operational strategy develops to respond to hostilities, more often than not, more appropriate to the conventional environment.<sup>(3)</sup> Clearly, military capability remains important, but as a complement to other aspects of national power and policy.

As in the case of the Caribbean or other developing nations such as Afghanistan, it is most likely that a low-level conflict between NATO client and Warsaw Pact surrogate forces will be the greatest challenge through the next decade.<sup>(4)</sup> Peace and freedom may well depend on how well the United States is prepared to meet this challenge. In these comments, the reader will detect a common thread of American-Soviet relations and the influence of Soviet surrogates such as Cuba or insurgencies driven by the wealth of drugs. Ongoing international terrorism in El Salvador and Nicaragua exemplify this thought.

In 1986, the US Army completed a Joint Low-Intensity Conflict Study which included representatives of the CIA, Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), and Department of State. The final report was critical of the United States' ability to face a challenge of political violence short of conventional war. The

problem was found to be a lack of concept understanding, a lack of national strategy, and a lack of ability to sustain operations. (5)

#### General

Warfighting as it relates to LIC is much broader than that normally associated with conventional war. It makes little difference whether LIC means revolutionary, unconventional, or counterinsurgency warfare; it cannot be won merely through military means. History is destined to repeat itself if conventional measures are used against unconventional indirect forces. The indirect form of warfare will be fought on the guerrillas' terms. It is a means for the weaker side to conduct hostilities from a secure base and launch raids on government installations, personnel, and economic targets. Both the United States and the Soviets learned this lesson in Vietnam and Afghanistan respectively. This is not to imply that military means aren't a part of the solution, they simply must be integrated into broader regional issues and political objectives. Academicians have argued that Third World countries have the ability to control regional destinies if left alone. However, with the influence of organized crime and insurgencies driven by the drug market, graft, and assassination, the ability of governments to tackle regional issues is lessened. Further, the debt crisis has caused the governments to find difficulty in controlling drug trade because an alternative to jobs and income

derived from narcotics is not available. This economic distress not only endangers democracy, but ultimately national security.(6)

#### Low-Intensity Conflict Definition and Problem

Reflecting back 30 years, President Kennedy attempted to achieve a counterinsurgency policy. He said:

There is another type of war, new in its intensity, ancient in its origins--war by guerrillas, subversives, insurgents, assassins; war by ambush instead of combat; by infiltration instead of engaging him . . . . It requires in those situations where we must counter it . . . a whole new strategy, a whole different kind of force, and therefore a new and wholly different kind of military training.(7)

As stated in the "National Security Strategy of the United States" the conflict "takes place at levels below conventional war but above the routine, peaceful competition among states."(8)

#### JCS Pub 1 states:

Low-intensity conflict is a limited politico-military struggle to achieve political, social, economic, or psychological objectives. It is often protracted and ranges from diplomatic, economic, and psycho-social pressures through terrorism and insurgency. Low-intensity conflict is usually confined to a geographic area and is often characterized by constraints on the weaponry, tactics, and the level of violence.(9)

At the low-end of the spectrum, it is well understood that military assistance is most often used to help host governments train their forces, not only in the use of weapons, but ultimately in applying doctrine. Military aid in the form of weapons and equipment is a central theme to the scenario. In latter stages, complete US combat units are integrated into

operations. At this point, the largest misunderstanding of the definition develops by failing to explain when low graduates to a higher level of conflict. One argument implies that the graduation should take place when the intervening power makes the decision to commit a battalion size combat force to the conflict.<sup>(10)</sup> Another argument indicates that the graduation should take place when an Army Division or Air Force Wing is committed.<sup>(11)</sup> For the purpose of this study and the reader's consideration, by adding the latter argument to the JCS Pub 1 definition, the point of graduation would be clarified and the concept of LIC would be easier to understand. The absence of large units of armored ground maneuver forces and high-performance aircraft on both sides would classify the environment as low-intensity.

The definition is obviously conceptually evasive, because what is low-intensity in one region, may be high in another. Veterans of the Vietnam War characterize the conflict as low-intensity primarily on the grounds that it was an unconventional war against an insurgency. However, the Vietnamese would deny that it was anything but high-intensity. Conversely, most people would characterize the Falkland War as mid-intensity because it was fought along the lines of a conventional conflict not involving an insurgency.

Of all definitions, the central theme of low-intensity conflict is revolution and insurgency. Insurgency implies an

organized movement aimed at the overthrow of a government through the use of subversion and armed conflict.

Terrorism as implied in these definitions should not be considered as applying only to LIC. Terrorism has largely been associated with the approach taken by a group of individuals seeking to make a global political statement or to commit an act of violence to support their vision of revolutionary change. More appropriately, police forces rather than the military are charged with countering this threat. However, when state-sponsored terrorism becomes an integral part of their strategy, military forces must be trained to focus on such a challenge.<sup>(12)</sup>

#### US National Security Interest

Third World countries residing within the Caribbean Basin rank at the bottom of the list of "vital US interests." Obviously Europe, Japan, and the Middle and Far East are at the top of the list. The distinction between vital and general interest would imply that the United States is far more likely to initiate hostilities over the former, but not the latter. If not vital, it still constitutes serious national defense implications because of its proximity to the US mainland. The Panama Canal remains a strategic passage which the US security as well as our treaty obligations to Panama dictate that we defend.<sup>(13)</sup> To ignore or downplay the significance of the region falling under Marxist influence is short-sighted. The socialist expansionist objectives throughout the globe

historically have been to create a regime in the Caribbean with political and military ties to Moscow. These ties would serve as a "springboard" for further force projection throughout the Western Hemisphere. This strategic approach is opportunistic: the relentless expansion of influence whenever the opportunities present themselves. Such an evasive approach largely avoids a direct challenge to US congressional and public interest that would trigger a violent response. Obviously, the United States would respond quickly against threats to the Panama Canal or the US mainland as it did during the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962. The Soviet Union removed its strategic weapons from Cuba in exchange for expectation that the United States would not invade Cuba to overthrow Castro and his government. This issue is pointed out as a historical perspective to be considered during similar Soviet expansion into Central America. The Soviet Union visibly backed down and agreed to respect US supremacy in the Western Hemisphere.<sup>(14)</sup>

Over half of US foreign trade and petroleum pass through the Caribbean. US citizens must not forget that this is the first real communist aggression on the American mainland. The reality that Florida is closer to Nicaragua and Cuba than the nation's capital should cause grave concerns. The importance is not how geographically large it is; but where it is. To the military, it is the soft-underbelly of the United States and is strategically important not only in terms of its geographic proximity to the mainland, but that it could dominate

the maritime chokepoints through the Caribbean Basin. A majority of the logistical supplies required by NATO would flow through these waters. Soviet surrogates could cause enough threat in the area during mobilization to require diversion of vital forces to protect these sea lanes. These forces could ultimately cause a force shortfall to Europe and the North Atlantic, possibly altering the strategic balance of forces.<sup>(15)</sup> Domestically, chaos and instability in the region could cause an overwhelming refugee flow not only from Central America, but ultimately Mexico, a country already faced with economic and political turmoil.<sup>(16)</sup>

Deprived of a sufficiently powerful justification for responding to small wars, the US democratic process has been slow to develop a policy to assure economic, political, and social stability throughout the region. Nicaragua and Cuba have become a pro-Soviet "stepping-stone" in Central America. Add to this complex equation Soviet military weapons and financial aid, and we see Castro remaining as the Cuban dictator and Russian puppet for three decades. Clearly, Cuba's linguistic and cultural affinities have been much more effective in carrying out strategies in Central America than the Soviets themselves could ever hope to do. However, with the Soviet economic failures, the United States may likely see improved diplomatic relations with Cuba.

### Small Wars Adrift

The United States must join the international community in finding a resolution to Central America's wars that will result in regional stability. Countries such as Belize and Costa Rica are examples of how democracy has worked in an ethnically plural society. These governments have a history of peace, stability, and free elections. They don't even have an army.<sup>(17)</sup> Clearly, if these peaceful governments can thrive, there is hope for fragile governments such as El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Panama, and Nicaragua. There is still time to allow this to happen and the United States, along with her allies, has an obligation to help for the sake of all.<sup>(18)</sup>

The history of political democracy has largely been dismal throughout the region. Military along with political intimidation has been common. Ruling parties have controlled the electoral outcomes resulting in the alienation of public support and sentiment causing obstacles for long-term political success.<sup>(19)</sup>

The key to political stability is to mobilize public support for political legitimacy of those who will govern and how they will govern. Unlike the peaceful political characteristics of a democratic society, the LIC atmosphere is often nurtured by a population lacking a democratic process, thus resorting to violence to obtain a political change.<sup>(20)</sup>

In August 1987, five Central American presidents joined efforts to devise a plan to end conflict in the region. The



plan was based on the ideas and carries the name of Costa Rican President Oscar Arias. It essentially provided a framework based on three initiatives: (1) regional nonaggression by neighboring countries; (2) an end to insurgency support; and (3) respect for political rights.<sup>(21)</sup>

The Arias Plan has resulted in significant improvements in the region. Cease-fire negotiations between the Sandinista Government of Nicaragua and the Nicaraguan Armed Resistance (Contras) have shown progress. Admittedly, the situation remains volatile. Violence has been a way of life and antagonism runs deep. Military forces in El Salvador and Nicaragua have multiplied many times over the last few years. With the advent of PERESTROIKA (restructuring - governmental and economic), the Soviets have recognized that they have been overextended and cannot continue to project power into Nicaragua. Perhaps over time, this restraint will become an ingrained habit; perhaps not.<sup>(22)</sup>

In support of the Arias Plan, the United States must resist providing covert aid to the Contras. As the plan suggests, only humanitarian aid would be appropriate. US law is clear that military policy and US-supported developmental aid must remain separate.<sup>(23)</sup> Both pots of money are different and if allowed to commingle would institute a statutory violation. This sounds clear enough; well it isn't. Military forces in developing nations often represent a labor force available for developmental and civic action projects. US law would imply

that developmental funds cannot be used by the military. Granted, to do so would involve possible law violations, especially in Third World nations with a history of military involvement in politics. Yet, the military contributions to economic development are obvious. The law should be modified to allow ambassadors as head-of-country teams to apply funds toward specific development programs regardless of labor source. This initiative is not risk free, but would help address the root causes of rebuilding shattered public sectors.

#### Contra Demise

The US-backed Contra rebel force fighting Nicaragua's Sandinista Government has largely lost the war. Their fate was sealed when the Reagan administration and a fainthearted Congress terminated military and financial aid in 1988. Most of the Contra troops along with their families have fled to Honduras and are no longer in a position to wage an effective campaign against the Sandinista Army.

The United States, whether it likes it or not, is deeply involved and partially to blame for the Contra demise. Washington now has a moral obligation to encourage the disbandment of the Contra movement and move toward a settlement of hostilities. Relocation assistance and humanitarian aid must be made available to relocate rebels to suitable environments either in the United States or friendly countries in the region.(24)

During a summit meeting in February 1988, five Central American presidents, Oscar Arias of Costa Rica, Jose Napoleon Duarte of El Salvador, Vinicio Cerezo of Guatemala, Daniel Ortega of Nicaragua, and Jose Azcone Hoyo of Honduras met in San Salvador to determine the fate of the Contras. At the same time, a United Nations meeting took place in New York and devised a proposal to establish an unarmed peacekeeping force along the Honduran-Nicaraguan border. Such Central American accords express a readiness to participate in the design and implementation of the necessary procedures for a negotiated mutual security settlement. Even President Daniel Ortega, from Nicaragua, pledged to move his nation toward democracy despite US skepticism.<sup>(25)</sup> Clearly, the bankruptcy of the Ortega Government is one of the best weapons against the spread of Marxism.

Militarily and politically, US support to the Contras has failed. The US military forces must now keep a low profile to allow diplomacy to resolve regional issues.<sup>(26)</sup> However, CINCSOUTH must be prepared to assist Honduras if the Sandinistas decide to cross the border and attack the Contras. Then, only enough force to reestablish status quo should be used.

It will not be easy to devise adequate security arrangements, but the time is ripe to start negotiations. Indications are encouraging that Nicaragua is ready to grant democratic concessions. Canada, Spain, and West Germany have expressed their readiness to participate in the process. Any

international assistance for rebuilding devastated economies probably will be held in abeyance pending a demonstrated democratic reform that opens real political opportunities for opposition groups. This not only implies free elections and freeing of political prisoners, but also free access to the media. (27)

#### Marxism vs Democracy

In many Third World Marxist societies such as Nicaragua, democracy and freedom mean something quite different from the US interpretation. It means simply, a gift from the ruling monarchs rather than an irrevocable right of the people. Having said that, Marxism still has a hold on people's imaginations and remains extremely troublesome. Where social change and freedom is badly needed, Marxism retains considerable appeal as a revolutionary tool, a way of gaining power, making a global statement, and punishing the ruling elites. (28)

With the Soviet's adoption of PERESTROIKA and GLASNOST (openness/transparent/visibility), the United States is witnessing the dismal failure of Marxism as an economic, political, and social system. However, it would imply that America and her allies are winning the Cold War. Over a generation, Marxism was fought against and fought for; today it is simply a failure. Marxist societies remain largely underdeveloped and cannot feed their own people. This idea may indicate a major change in the balance of power. The United States as the world's leading democratic, anti-communist power

can take satisfaction from the failure. However, it must take the initiative to substitute for a failed Marxism the continuing success of the free world system.<sup>(29)</sup>

Despite Russia's new flexibility, the rivalry between the free western societies and totalitarian societies is not over. A less ideologically driven Russia may present a greater challenge to developing nations than the old heavy-handed expansionist power which frightened people. Moscow appears to be winning the public relations struggle.

In Central America, the United States must welcome the apparent Soviet recognition that it has been overextended, and that heavy support of Marxist governments has been too costly for its failing economy to bear.

It is clear, even in the Third World, that Marxism is not a realistic means to bring about reform, stability, and development. Alternatives must be built around democracy and market economics which have made encouraging progress in Asia and much of Latin America. Behind this favorable backdrop, progress can also occur in Central America.

The United States must realize that market solutions will be difficult to apply in countries that lack the infrastructure, education, and social values that a free market economy requires.<sup>(30)</sup> Americans are quick to argue that the solution must come in the form of redistribution of wealth. For wealth to be redistributed, it first must be created through a long process of education, decentralization to the market force,

and the lessening of bureaucracy. But as Central American governments try to introduce market forces and incentives, they will find that these are not forces that can be bolted into a flawed machine to make it run better. It will be a slow evolutionary process and will not result in observable short-term gains. The key will be initiative, risk-taking, and individualism.

### Military Policy

As the United States enters the twenty-first century, she faces an increasingly complex and dangerous international environment in Central America. The challenge for military strategy will be to understand this environment, to adapt doctrine and strategy to assure national security, and to protect vital interests. This strategy must be effective across the entire spectrum of conflict, from high-intensity that would involve the Soviet Union or smaller similarly sophisticated forces, to low-intensity which will include terrorism and insurgency.

The fighting force plays less of a role at the low end of the conflict spectrum than in a conventional environment. This role reversal reflects the unique character of military operations in such a conflict. The Army force structure has specialized units such as Special Forces Groups and Rangers capable of responding across the spectrum of conflict. They are complemented by aviation, communication, and psyop units. In addition to these Special Operating Forces (SOF), the Army has

added highly mobile light divisions which are designed to fight in the low-intensity environment, yet retain the capability for mid-to-high intensity conflicts. These SOF elements along with Nation Building Forces such as Medical and Engineers play a key role. These forces must assist friendly governments in providing essential public services as a prerequisite for legitimacy. Clearly, the indirect application of US forces, primarily through security assistance, is the most appropriate means to help regional governments protect their citizens.<sup>(31)</sup> Some would argue that instability and conflict in the region could be solved by removing the Soviet influence. This idea is not practical since going to the source could be catastrophic and dangerous. Others would argue that poverty and political freedom lie at the heart of the problem; and that the answers are social, economic, and democratic reform. Regional solutions tend to support the latter argument.

A conflict short of conventional war will be the most likely form of challenge through the early part of the twenty-first century. Having said that, then it is most imperative that military leaders and policy-makers understand the seriousness and consequences of political and military policies for the region. Given the likelihood of such a scenario, one would expect to find a well articulated response as a national strategy. This clearly is not the case. Policy-makers, hampered by a lack of a general concept understanding, have failed to adequately address the broad range of issues

required to galvanize a national will. With the debate over the budget, debt, and burden sharing, policy-makers are even more divided over what is a threat to national interests and how to respond. They uniformly agree that the Soviets are the most perceptible conventional threat, but cannot agree on how much of a deterrence is enough. How then can they be expected to respond to a threat that is not clear? Without this sense of purpose, national strategy will be evasive and slow to respond to a crisis. (32)

It is not the purpose of this paper to develop roles and mission guidance. But simply stated, each country's US Ambassador represents the President of the United States and is responsible for implementing policy. That seems clear enough. However, CINCSOUTH is responsible for military activities and provides regional guidance to friendly governments on the application of military operations. He is accountable to the JCS on the achievement of military policy, and must explain the progress and obstacles to force application. Add to this complex issue, a Task Force or MILGROUP Commander who essentially has to work for two bosses while conducting the war from day-to-day. They are in an unenviable position of trying to please both the Ambassador and CINCSOUTH. This is not to imply that military and political issues are diametrically opposed, they simply must be integrated into the classic Clausewitzian notion that both are viewed as instruments of policy. (33)



The military commander in the low-intensity environment must be extremely sensitive when applying force so as not to imply military escalation at the expense of inhibiting an ambassador's effort to derive a political solution to regional issues. Diplomacy and amiable relations must unite all parties under the same regional objective.<sup>(34)</sup>

In the LIC environment, the gravity of legal and moral issues take on a special meaning. The commander of forces must fulfill a moral obligation to the population. Excessive use of force resulting in civilian deaths or human rights violations will quickly revert the population to insurgency support. The lesson was learned in Vietnam. Similarly, efforts to remove General Noriega from Panama succeeded only in converting the opposition into critics of US policy.<sup>(35)</sup>

Purely military operations in a LIC environment are largely no-win situations that will not achieve a decisive victory or at least not quickly. Ultimately, loss of US public support is almost inevitable. Military lives and physical resources will be squandered which will destroy the basic ingredient-popular support. The United States is a nation that expects immediate gratification. For that reason, they expect a quick and just victory. The American people knew little of Grenada, but were pleased with its results. It was a mid-intensity combat raid and took place over a limited period of time with a clear beginning and end. LIC does neither. Finally, LIC does not follow the warrior's code of chivalry.

The public is reluctant to tolerate innocent casualties. The media will quickly exploit atrocities or misbehavior which quickly fuels public interest. The public is far more likely to accept a conflict if their personal interests are violated; not however, to war against some low-intensity, vague ideological threat when more pressing issues are found at home.<sup>(36)</sup>

#### Security Assistance

The purpose of security assistance is to aid friendly governments who are defending their self interest against anti-democratic forces fueled through such countries as the Soviet Union, Cuba, and Nicaragua. US military assistance will be obliged to help train defense forces not only in the use of weapons, but also in applying doctrine. Objectives of the program must demonstrate governmental concern to establish conditions favorable for economic and political stability. The key to this issue is freedom from outside hostile intervention. When individuals are given a personal stake in a free democratic process and benefit from the fruits of their labor--only then will they become economically progressive; thus removing the causes of insurgency and tyranny.

Nation building military forces will play a key security assistance role through the next decade. Engineers will provide technical expertise while building infrastructure projects such as farm-to-market roads, schools, and public utilities which benefit the total population. Medical units will train the public sector raising the quality of health care

and sanitation. Military Police will provide for law and order. Public Affairs will assist governments in mobilizing public opinion and fostering national unity. SOFs are the most appropriate means to help regional governments train their defense forces to protect the population. Finally, if all else fails, the unique capabilities of the US light forces (Light Infantry, Airborne, Ranger, and Special Forces) will allow a forcible insertion against an armed opposition when a crisis cannot be contained. The United States saw this strategic deterrence capability during "Operation Golden Pheasant" when the 7th Light Infantry Division and the 82d Airborne Division deployed to Honduras in 1988. Committing the Army was the strongest signal the United States could send to a potential enemy and displayed an undeniable sign of national will.

#### Intelligence

General Gorman, CINC, USSOUTHCOM in 1985 was extremely critical of US Research and Development efforts which have failed to develop less manpower-intensive intelligence collection and communications equipment. He argued that intelligence units are manned and equipped to collect against Soviet targets and are largely inept in a Third World scenario. The importance of real-time intelligence to ambassadors and host nation defense forces is obvious. However, it creates a problem for host nation and US forces who wish to minimize the visibility and maximize the security of collection efforts.

The United States tends to focus on firepower rather than the most appropriate grass roots intelligence. This is where Special Forces units can help. The key is to put the intelligence eyes and ears in the region first. It must be culturally sensitive, language capable, and willing to stay in place for a long time. The end result will be human ground sensors that report the grass roots story. Without these sensors, the rest of the system never finds out about a problem until too late.<sup>(38)</sup>

#### Civic Action and Psychological Operations

Civil Affairs and Psychological Operations (psyops) units have largely disappeared from the active forces. Almost two-thirds are in the reserve components. They basically have become obsolescent and do not have the skills necessary to operate in a sustained low-intensity environment. Few units have enough Hispanic speaking personnel capable of assisting throughout Latin America.<sup>(39)</sup>

#### Mobility

The first item of equipment that a foreign government requests from the United States while operating against a low-intensity threat is the helicopter. Clearly their tactical mobility advantages are obvious; however, they are expensive to acquire and operate. The problem is a lack of on-board fuel reserves to allow extended operation. Similarly, the C-130 Hercules is too expensive and too complicated to fly and

maintain. The United States abandoned the C-7 Caribou short-take-off-and-land transport in favor of the C-130, an aircraft limited by available runways in the region. Only 20 to 30 airfields are C-130 capable, vice 1,000 or so C-7 capable. Additionally, a problem cited by SOUTHCOM is the lack of US capability to operate in a "brown water" maritime environment. Most of the "brown water" forces are at minimum strength and their equipment is outdated.<sup>(40)</sup>

#### Economic and Social Implications

The Central American industrial sector grew rapidly during the 1950s through the early 1970s. During the period, strong economic pluralism and social justice met with strong popular support. However, with a failing economy in the early 1980s, the military directed police force took control of the governments and established its own program for social change. To consolidate control of presidential elections, manipulation and violence became a common occurrence causing opposition parties to withdraw from elections. The source of all the tension was nourished by the region's pressing economic troubles. Prior to the 1970s, the countries of Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua sustained strong economic growth rates, above four percent per year.<sup>(41)</sup> Against such a favorable backdrop, why has Central America's early economic development lost momentum? The answer lies with human rights violations, the impact of high illiteracy, the

devastative effect of industrial sabotage, and economic dislocation. Each will be discussed in turn.<sup>(42)</sup>

First, despite a history of wide-scale poverty, military governments, and coups, the region has argued that it does not suffer systemic abuses of human rights. The truth, however, is that abuse is largely a question of scale. Political executions and disappearances of political prisoners have been common. With the exception of Belize and Costa Rica, social unrest has been caused by corrupted revolutions, repressed human liberties, denial of free elections, economic dislocation, and violation of public pledges. For example, the Sandinistas promised freedom in Nicaragua, but only replaced the former dictatorship with their own. However, significant progress is being made. Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador are attempting to pattern their form of government after Costa Rica's democracy. Democracy means much more than a mechanical process to elect political leaders. It encompasses strong, civilian leadership and effective political parties capable of articulating the needs of the people. It also must include a strong union between business and labor which guarantees equitable wages. Such relationships are key to a lasting democracy and will take place only through the process of free democratic elections and not totalitarian military dictatorship.<sup>(43)</sup>

Second, the world is entering an information and technology age. Even developing countries must be prepared to

meet the demands of a world of rapidly changing knowledge. It is often argued that a "Marshall Plan" is needed to rebuild Central America's economy. This thought as it applies to an underdeveloped nation cannot be confused with that of post-World War II Europe. The Europeans possessed a large pool of skilled manpower ingrained in a long-term industrial tradition. A thought that needs to be explored, however, is that of skilled manpower. It would imply that the most pressing problem of a lack of technical skills would require an investment in education in light of a high illiteracy rate in the region. Education assistance must have commensurate priority along with an investment in industrial and physical capital.<sup>(44)</sup> To do otherwise would make it extremely difficult to tackle the political and social variables in this equation which depend so heavily on the improvement of human skills. Obviously, the key boils down to education as having the largest long-range payoffs in economic growth. Such education will help to raise the earning capacity of those who would otherwise earn the least. Evidence is overwhelming that education and national product are related. The connection between literacy and economic development is so evident in a progressing society. The target is not only the youth, but also their teachers. Grants for teacher education must be made available to allow training in the United States and other Latin American countries.

Heavy industry must also be developed, but not at the expense of agriculture. In developing nations, agriculture is

the force driving economic growth. As mentioned, export earnings during the 1970s proved a real gross domestic product potential. The region can achieve that status again.

Third, the largest part of Central America has suffered through two decades of self-destruction. The region is still torn by conflict, but major peace initiatives among five nations are underway. It will require all parties to commit to the same rules and share in common visions. Costa Rica, Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras have committed to these goals. Only Nicaragua has remained evasive; however, even they have shown progress and concessions.<sup>(45)</sup> This is not to imply that peace and prosperity is breaking out all over, it just simply will be a slow process.

Combine deep economic slump indicators with the disruption of life by insurgency violence and the most catastrophic economic decline results. In a region plagued with scarce safe drinking water, guerrillas have destroyed pumping stations and electrical transmission towers that carry the energy to run them. In a nation with endemic overpopulation, where employment potential is poor and where capital investment must be cultivated, guerrilla action has forced the closure of industry, the abandonment of farms, and the displacement of labor. This spread of violence and uncertainty has made international investors extremely cautious of ventures anywhere in Central America.<sup>(46)</sup> Progress is being made; however, CINCSOUTH may be required to assist by providing military forces



to assure regional nonaggression and to end insurgent violence. Only then will diplomacy and mutual cooperation between warring parties provide a chance for reconciliation.

Fourth, if Central American countries are ever able to break the vicious cycle of deprivation, repression, and violence, the region's economies must be rebuilt, expanded, and made more equitable. Market solutions to this complex issue will be extremely difficult to apply in countries that lack the political infrastructure, education, and social values that a free market requires. These frightening and harsh side effects of the market economy will have to be cushioned with economic aid.<sup>(47)</sup> Those providing aid must be extremely cautious. Historically, it has resulted in a permanent dependence on the aid and caused a disincentive for domestic saving. Also, it often inflates the size of the public sector at the expense of the more dynamic and lasting private sector.<sup>(48)</sup>

Finally, economic distress not only endangers short-term policy, but ultimately US national security. Peace and freedom in the region may well depend on how well the international community is prepared to meet this challenge. Foremost, the region's debt crisis must be confronted head-on. Clearly, recovery and political stability is blocked by the massive burden of an unpayable debt. For this reason, financially strapped governments are unable to confront crippling social problems. Add to this, the disabling impact of global recession and a tremendous obstacle to real economic

growth develops. The value of export commodities such as coffee, cotton, bananas, and sugar has plummeted while import costs of petroleum and financial capital borrowed from hard currency countries has risen. The result is a shocking economic dislocation.(49)

Can the Third World debt issue be resolved? There seem to be two possible alternatives to this problem as part of an Economic Assistance program. The United States and its allies could either excuse the debt or extend payments at a reduced rate. The latter is the most palatable to US citizens in light of domestic budget deficits at home. However, both alternatives would provide significant benefits by allowing political and military leverage on regional issues of debtor nations. With the lessening of the debt burden, tax incentives for domestic trade and commercial investment in the region would introduce vital technology and develop new market opportunities for export products. These initiatives along with close cooperation with the International Monetary Fund and development banks would ease the shocking capital flight and economic dislocation problem. Currently, the region is caught on a vicious treadmill of painful austerity and economic stagnation. After the economy becomes revitalized, only then will the region become alive and prosperous.(50)

#### Drugs: A National Security Problem

Determining the relationship between illegal drug traffickers and terrorists, or insurgent groups is a key factor

linking drugs to national security. The following questions must be answered which ultimately may effect US evolving relations with Central American governments:

1. How do drug trafficking groups relate to corruption and violence in producing nations?
2. What is being done to fight drugs?
3. Can the flow of drugs be stopped?
4. What more can be done?<sup>(51)</sup>

First, evidence tends to indicate that most of the Central American countries are either directly involved in illegal drug production or are involved in drug money laundering. This would imply a tremendous impact on the governments, economies, and societies of the producing and supporting countries alike. Payoffs to governments, police forces, and militaries in return for favors and protection breed corruption at every level. Regional governments must either say no to narcotics and the ancillary corruption that it breeds or they must eventually say no to democracy. Where narcotics prosper, the political institutions are undermined. Where the guardians of the constitution are corrupt, so is self-respect and sovereignty. Clearly the foundation of democracy rests on an ethical and moral foundation of which drugs will destroy the basic fabric of self-government. Modern societies live in a world in which manufacturing processes in a global economy will supply goods and raw materials to the market of choice. Open societies must be prepared to take advantage of such market

opportunities. The profound implication is clear that closed drug corrupt societies will not be able to progress.<sup>(52)</sup>

Second, there must be no confusion in any nation about the high priority the United States assigns to combatting illegal drugs or any doubt about our willingness to link economic assistance to narcotics control. But having US sponsored programs is not enough. The international community must join the effort and work together, bilaterally and multilaterally, on regional approaches to control problems. It is clear that producing nations are experiencing drug abuse and addiction throughout their own societies. It no longer is just a US problem. International strategies must give top priority to crop control enforced by eradication when necessary. Financial and technical assistance must also be provided for drug control projects.

But first, governments of producing nations must demonstrate the political will to initiate an effective drug control program. The corruption that has undermined control efforts must be stamped out by strong and determined leadership. The increasing willingness of narcotics traffickers to use terrorist-type violence to thwart drug control programs has been obvious. A wave of assassinations and killing of law enforcement officers has strengthened the resolve of narcotics control agents. Source and victim nations both have a common interest in the success of control programs. There are large incentives on the part of producing nations to act swiftly.

Virtually every source and many money laundering countries are suffering from economic dislocation, political instability, and violence related to drug trafficking. These countries must increasingly understand that they are the beneficiaries when the trend of international lawlessness has been reversed. The United States stands ready to help regional governments work together for the common good. Many are simply too poor to mount an effective campaign and eradication program. The international narcotics policies are designed to overcome these obstacles by providing bilateral assistance not only for crop control but to train foreign enforcement officials.

Third, unfortunately, no country in the Western Hemisphere has been able to adequately control the trafficking of illegal drugs or the precursor chemicals which make it all possible. While progress is being made, the international community is faced with numerous challenges. Worldwide production of opium, coca leaf, and cannabis exceeds that consumed by drug abusers. Markets, processing areas, and trafficking routes shift proportionally at the rate that success is achieved in eradicating crops. Some countries have not done enough to reduce crop levels. Others could no more. A sad commentary, crop production still provides a surplus of narcotics that exceeds demand. On the demand side, the United States must recognize that our international campaign against drug abuse rests ultimately on the ability to reduce domestic demand. To a greater degree than many realize, success in the international

narcotics control effort is largely dependent on the success of our own ability to control abuse at home. It will be hard to convince supplier nations to put an end to production if they believe we are not living up to our end of the deal. Clearly, domestic efforts will send a message around the globe that the United States intends to control its own drug abuse problem. The United States has made progress, but it will be a slow process. Drug abuse is the symptom of a deep social and cultural phenomenon; the erosion of traditional family values. Faith in this institution is returning. Today, there is a spreading consensus that drugs are not fashionable. It has been a result of efforts to educate our youth about the dangers of drugs; detoxification and treatment of drug abusers; and research aimed at understanding the causes and consequences of drug abuse.<sup>(53)</sup>

Fourth, leaders of the Andean Parliament and members of the US Congress met, in Washington DC during July 1988, to discuss the national security implications of narcotrafficking. They established measures for the elimination of both consumption and production of narcotics, and called for policies to combat drug money laundering. Goals were established to:

- Refine the State Department's International Narcotics Control Program which contributes \$100 million a year to worldwide law enforcement and anti-drug efforts.

- Expand military assistance programs to countries where the defense establishment cooperates with the civil sector in controlling drug trafficking.

-- Revise US laws to allow security assistance to militaries historically denied by law because of fears that such assistance would strengthen dictatorships.

-- Provide economic assistance to help countries make the transition to a legal economy. (53)

Finally, President Bush has asked for \$40 million in 1989 to allow selected National Guard forces to start anti-drug projects. Missions of those units have been redefined to make anti-drug activities equally as important as training for combat. Units selected for this program are primarily military police, communication, radar, and aviation. This assistance must be integrated into regional governmental programs to stem corruption. Without regional cooperation, this program is largely doomed to failure. An alternative to jobs and income derived from drug trade can only develop after the region becomes economically alive and prosperous. This again will be a slow evolutionary process through the next decade. (54)

#### Conclusion

If low-intensity warfare in Central America is to be contained, the military commander and strategist will be obliged to adjust conventional thinking in terms of regional realities. Once freed from parochial thinking, policy may be devised to strengthen political, social, and economic programs with the end result of visible long-term worth. In this way, the United States will be able to avoid the political liability of a counterproductive conventional presence in a region.

Collectively, these comments have provided evidence contributing to the development and interpretation of general long-term strategies for operations at the low end of the conflict spectrum. This assessment has focused on specific implications relevant to an understanding of these complex issues. However, this is not to imply that these comments are based on concrete ideas because they correctly are based on generalizations caused by a general lack of definition and scope of the nature of the threat. To date, even strategists can't agree on the upper and lower limits of this issue other than to say it involves insurgency and terrorism that cannot be deterred in the conventional sense.

To further complicate these issues, Americans are impatient and desire quick results from monetary investment. And therein lies the problem, causing national strategy to lean more toward mid-to-high-intensity conflict. A basic lack of US unity of effort, along with a lack of unified national strategy aggravates this equation.

The US Government must contribute not only resolve and wealth, but ultimately political and military leadership. These policies cannot be separated from security assistance measures on behalf of US interests. SOUTHCOM will be obliged to structure military forces to play their proper role in protecting regional investments. Military aid, in the form of National Building Forces and Security Assistance, will play a key role in this effort.



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